

The Dresden Key Bugle

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THE key bugle has always been treated by historians as having only one basic system of keys. The original patent was for an instrument having five closed keys to which a sixth open key near the bell was soon added.¹ Shortly thereafter an extra d# key was also included on many bugles. All known fingering charts refer to this system of five, six, or seven keys of which the right hand operates the first three to five and the left hand only the last two. Most of the notes in the normal two-octave range of the instrument are fingered with the right hand. There have been additions to this system—some bugles having as many as twelve keys—but still the function and fingering of the basic six or seven keys on these instruments have remained the same.

It is the purpose of this article to describe a different key system which was applied to some early bugles and which met with enough success to be found both in Europe and in America. This is an arrangement of six keys divided equally between left and right hands and dating from about 1820–1840. It was evidently an attempt to divide the workload more evenly between the two hands and to create patterns of fingering alternating right and left hands. It was probably unsuccessful because, regardless of how logical the idea might seem, it is demonstrably easier to manipulate the fingers of one hand accurately than to coordinate fingerings that alternate between two hands.

A popular American painting by William Harnett called “Old

1. The key bugle was patented by Joseph Halliday in Dublin in 1810. See R. Morley-Pegge, “Key Bugles,” in *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, fifth edition.



FIGURE I. "Old Models" by William Harnett, 1892.
Photograph courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

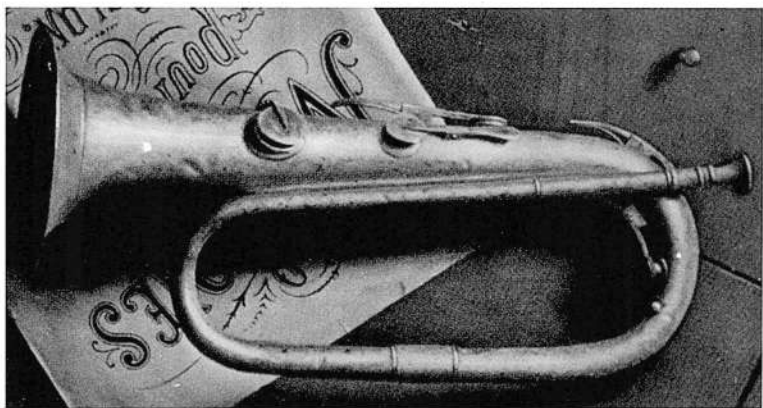


FIGURE 2. Detail of Harnett's "Old Models."

Models" (Figures 1 and 2) shows a number of objects sitting on a narrow shelf or hanging from a cabinet door, and among them is a curious key bugle. The painting is well known, since reproductions of it on postcards, prints, and postage stamps have been available from time to time; the original is in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The bugle strikes one as curious first because the mouth-pipe is on the wrong side. One might attribute this to a reversal during the reproduction process, were it not for the lettering, which is correct on the music underneath. One might also think of a bit of "artistic license," except that everything else in the painting, and indeed, in Harnett's entire output, is realistic almost to photographic detail.² Other unusual features in "Old Models" are the keys near the mouthpiece with shanks extending upward instead of downward, and the first key nearest the bell with its shank mounted across the bell rather than lengthwise.

2. An interesting paper read at the 1967 meetings of The American Musical Instrument Society in Vermillion, South Dakota, by Carol J. Oja described Harnett's life and work, and his efforts towards nostalgic realism.

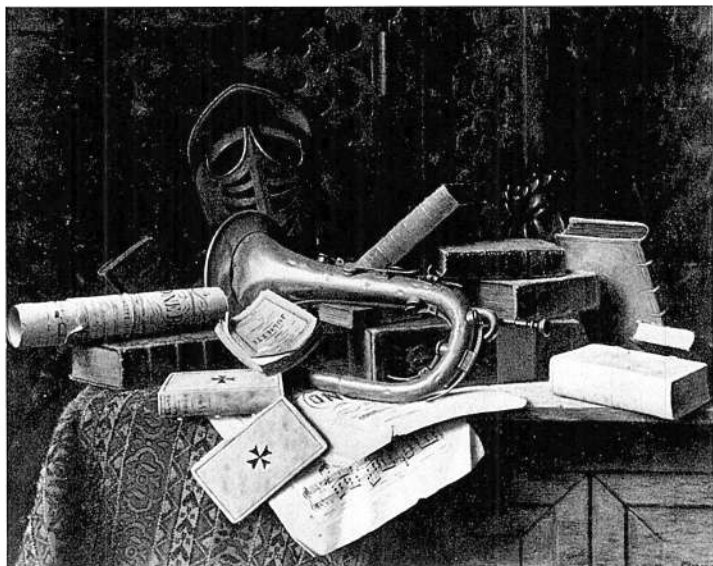


FIGURE 3. "Still Life: Helmet, Books, Trumpet, and Sheet Music" by William Harnett, 1883. Photograph courtesy of the High Museum of Art, Atlanta.

Another dimension is added to this problem when another painting by Harnett is considered. In his "Still Life, Helmet, Books, Trumpet, and Sheet Music" (Figure 3), there is another key bugle of perfectly normal configuration. It is known that two key bugles were sold from Harnett's estate after his death, strongly suggesting that actual instruments were used as models for these paintings.³ We must surmise, lacking more concrete evidence, that Harnett owned or was familiar with both the common key bugle and another of different and unusual design.

The Daniel S. Pillsbury Collection at the Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan, contains an unsigned brass key bugle with six keys almost exactly like the one in Harnett's "Old Models." The same left-side mouthpipe and key arrangements can be seen, along

3. Oja (see note 2).

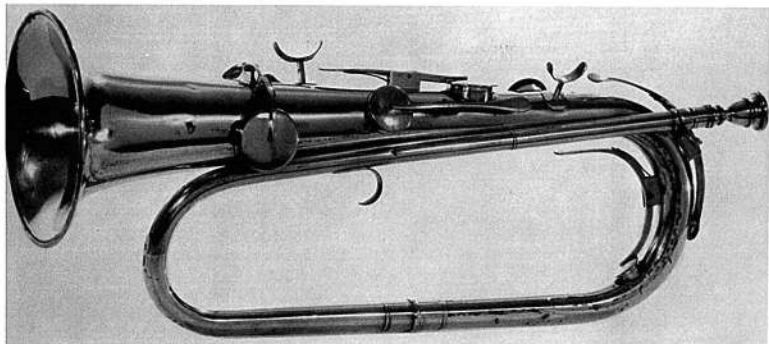


FIGURE 4. Unsigned key bugle, brass with six keys, ca. 1820–1840. Photograph courtesy of Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan.

with finger saddles or rests for each hand, which are absent in the Harnett painting. Viewing the instrument from both sides reveals an orderly, logical arrangement of keys (Figure 4) and is conclusive evidence that Harnett knew and painted a similar key bugle. Unfortunately lack of any signature or resemblance to instruments by known makers has thwarted any attempt to identify the source or maker of this instrument.

Recently a third example of this type of bugle came to my attention when reviewing an excellent little booklet by Reine Dahlqvist entitled *The Key Trumpet and Its Greatest Virtuoso, Anton Weidinger*.⁴ On page seven Mr. Dahlqvist includes a photograph of a key bugle clearly showing the same unique features as Harnett's painting and the Henry Ford Museum instrument. Although the author could better have included a more representative illustration, I was really delighted to find another example of the now familiar backward bugle. This time, however, the instrument bore a maker's signature and city, giving the first clues to the origin of the design. This bugle is found in the Musikmuseet, Stockholm, and is signed "I. (J.) G. Kersten, Dresden," a maker active until about 1840.

4. This *Journal*, II (1976), 101.

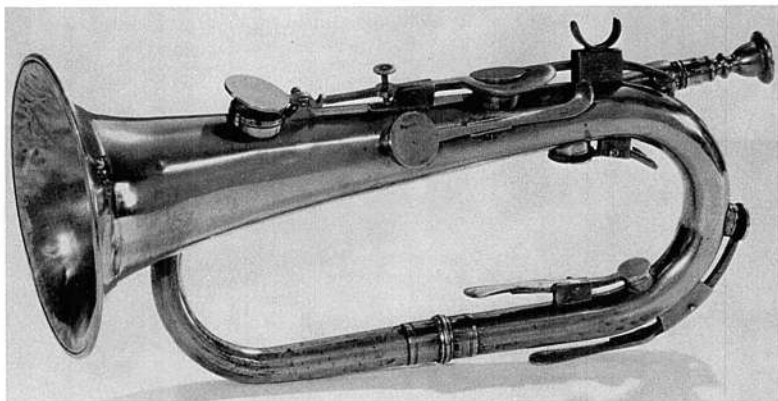


FIGURE 5. Unsigned six-key bugle, brass, ca. 1820-1840. Photograph courtesy of Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan.

Six-key bugles usually look like the one in Figure 5. The right hand operates keys 1, 2, 3, and 4 (counting from the bell) with fingers 5, 4, 2, and 1 respectively (thumb is 1) and the left hand is used only for keys 5 and 6 operated by fingers 1 and 2. On the Dresden bugle and its mates the keys are divided equally between the two hands. The right hand, placed over the top of the instrument near the bell, plays keys 1, 3, and 4 with fingers 5, 2, and 4; and the left hand, placed over the top of the bugle near the mouthpiece, operates keys 2, 5, and 6 with fingers 4, 2, and 1. Key 2 has been transferred to the right hand, and keys 5 and 6 have traded fingers.

In the two octaves from middle b to high c'' ten notes are fingered differently on the Dresden-type bugle, six of them a change from right- to left-hand fingering. In all, the common bugle has six open notes (requiring no fingering), eighteen notes played with the right hand, and two with the left; the Dresden instrument, six open, twelve right-, and eight left-hand notes. The major portion of the workload in fingering the Dresden bugle is still with the right hand because it controls keys nearest the bell which are used more fre-

quently; however, the left hand is given quite a bit more to do especially in sharp keys.

Below is the fingering chart for six-key bugles showing both common and Dresden bugle fingerings.

middle

Key	Finger	b	c	c#	d	d#	e	f	f#	g	g#	a	a#	b	c	c#	d	d#	e	f	f#	g	g#	a	a#	b	c	Finger	
6	L {	2	xxx	xx	oox	xx	xx	xxx	xx	xxx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xxx	xx	xxx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	1	
5		1	xxx	xx	xox	xx	xx	xxx	xx	xxx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xxx	xx	xxx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	2	
4	R {	1	xxx	xo	xxx	xx	xo	xxx	xo	xxx	xx	xo	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xxx	xx	xxx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	2	} R	
3		2	xxx	oo	xxx	xx	oo	xxx	oo	xxx	xx	oo	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xxx	xx	xxx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx		4
2		4	xxo	xx	xxx	xo	xx	xxo	xx	xox	xo	ox	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xxx	xx	xxx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx		4
1		5	xoo	oo	oox	oo	oo	xoo	oo	oox	oo	oo	oo	oo	oo	oo	oo	xxx	xx	xxx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx		5
	Common Fingering																										Dresden Fingering		

o=open

x=closed

Key one is normally open and closes when pressed. The others are normally closed and open when pressed.

Henry Ford Museum